

1 **9 - NARRATIVE:**

2 On October 22, 2007 at approximately 4:16 AM W-3 Tom DAVIS reported a
3 vegetation fire to the San Diego Unit on Rice Canyon Road near "Deadmans
4 Curve." This fire is identified as the Rice Fire, and eventually burned approximately
5 9,472 acres before being contained.
6

7 On October 23, 2007 I was assigned to conduct an Origin and Cause investigation
8 for the Rice Fire. I met with O-1 Fire Captain Specialist Preston FOUTS on Rice
9 Canyon Road, inside of the fire area. I learned from FOUTS he had spoken with
10 witnesses to the fire start who identified the general area where the fire had
11 originated.

12 *Perimeter Search*

13 During the perimeter search of the fire area, I identified witnesses to be interviewed
14 and located downed power lines in the area, later identified as the two Specific
15 Origin Areas. I also observed indicators which showed the General Origin Area as
16 being located on the east side of the fire, on both sides of Rice Canyon Road.
17

18 *Origin Determination*

19 I entered the burned area on the east side of Rice Canyon Road and observed
20 indicators which showed an advancing fire. These indicators included angle of char,
21 staining on rocks and areas of protection. I also observed areas of freezing, which
22 indicated wind direction. I determined the General Origin Area included both sides
23 of Rice Canyon Road, near the heel of the fire.
24

25 I first entered the area on the east side of Rice Canyon Road and observed
26 indications of an advancing fire. These indicators included angle of char on trunks
27 of trees, angle of char on brush, staining on rocks, and damage differential. I
28 identified the initial run, advancing fire, and marked these indicators with red flags. I
29 continued in a "S" pattern, observing indicators of a lateral moving fire. These
30 indicators included damage differential and comparing areas of protection with

1 exposed areas. I identified these areas as the flanks of the fire and marked them
2 with yellow colored flags.

3
4 I continued to an area where I began to observe indications of a backing fire. These
5 indicators included die-out patterns, areas of protection and staining on rocks. I
6 marked these areas with blue colored flagging. I identified this area where the fire
7 transitioned from advancing to backing and where the two flanks came together as
8 the Specific Origin Area #1.

9
10 I then entered the burned area on the west side of Rice Canyon Road to an area
11 where I observed indications of an advancing fire. These indicators included
12 staining on objects with in the burn, areas of protection and angle of char on brush
13 and small trees. I marked these indicators with red colored flags. I followed these
14 indicators back in a "S" pattern, where I also observed indications of a lateral moving
15 fire. These indicators included areas of protection and damage differential. I
16 marked these indicators with yellow colored flags.

17
18 I continued to an area where I observed indications of a backing fire. I observed
19 die-out patterns, staining and cupping. I identified this area where the fire
20 transitioned from an advancing fire to a backing fire and where the two flanks came
21 together as the Specific Origin Area #2. Within these two Specific Origin Areas I
22 completed the following cause elimination analysis.

23
24 *Cause Exclusion*

25 Lightning – The skies were clear and Santa Ana wind conditions were present.

26 There were no thunder heads observed while I was at the scene. Additionally, I
27 did not observe any signs of lightning strikes on the trees adjacent to the Specific
28 Origin Areas located. Based on the above I eliminated a lightning caused fire.

29 Spontaneous Combustion – During my investigation I did not observe any debris
30 piles, or remnants of debris, in the Specific Origin Areas which could have

1 contributed to the cause of the fire. There were no piled organic materials
2 typically associated with spontaneous combustion caused fires. Based on the
3 above facts I eliminated spontaneous combustion as a cause for the fire.

4 Campfire – While examining the Specific Origin Areas of the Rice Fire and during
5 the perimeter search I did not observe any remnants of campfires, or areas
6 where camping occurs. There were no rock rings, piles of firewood or other
7 signs of a campfire caused fire. Based on the above facts I eliminated a
8 campfire as the cause for the fire.

9 Smoking – During my investigation I did not locate any cigarette butts or other
10 smoking related materials in either Specific Origin Area. Specific Origin Area #1
11 is located uphill from Rice Canyon Road in an area where it is impossible for a
12 discarded cigarette from the roadway to come to rest. Specific Origin Area #2 is
13 located across a creek from the roadway. There is a gated dirt road which runs
14 north of Specific Origin Area #2, however the road was overgrown and did not
15 support frequent, if any, vehicle traffic. Based upon the above facts I eliminated
16 smoking as a cause for the fire.

17 Debris Burning – I did not observe any signs of debris burning in the area. I did not
18 observe any burn barrels, piled debris, or other indication of debris burning being
19 conducted in the area. San Diego also currently has a burn ban in effect which
20 prohibits debris burning. Based upon the above facts I eliminated debris burning
21 as a cause for the fire.

22 Vehicles – Both Specific Origin Areas were located away from Rice Canyon Road. I
23 observed no recent signs of vehicle traffic thru the Specific Origin Areas.
24 Specific Origin Area #1 was in-accessible to vehicle due to the rocky terrain and
25 vegetation. Additionally, I swept both Specific Origin Areas with a magnet and
26 did not recover any carbon particles associated with vehicle caused fires. I did
27 not observe any remnants of catalytic converter components within either
28 Specific Origin Area. Based upon the above facts I eliminated vehicles as a
29 cause for the fire.

30 Equipment use – I did not observe any signs of equipment use within either Specific

1 Origin Area. There were signs of recent tree work adjacent to Specific Origin
2 Area #2, however there was burned fuels underneath of the piled logs; and the
3 logs were undamaged by fire, which indicated the work occurred post-fire. I did
4 not observe any signs of strike marks on rocks, any track marks associated with
5 heavy equipment, or any other signs of equipment use. Based upon the above
6 facts I eliminated equipment use as a cause for the fire.

7 Railroad – There were no railroads in the area where the Rice Fire originated which
8 could have contributed to the cause of the fire. Based on the above facts I
9 eliminated railroads as contributing to the cause of the fire.

10 Fireworks – During my investigation I did not observe any remnants of fireworks in
11 either Specific Origin Area. I did not observe any signs typically associated with
12 the use of fireworks which would include discolored areas where they were
13 launched from, eyewitness statements or fireworks packaging in the area.
14 Based upon the above facts I eliminated a fireworks caused fire.

15 Playing with Fire – The Rice Fire was first reported at approximately 4:16 AM, which
16 is a time children are typically at home. I did not observe any forts or play areas
17 in either specific origin area which are typically associated with playing fire
18 caused fires. I did not observe any debris which would indicate the area where
19 the fire occurred is frequented by children. Based upon the above facts I
20 eliminated a playing with fire caused fire.

21 Power lines – During my investigation of Specific Origin Areas #1 and #2 I located
22 downed power lines. Each line showed areas of spackling and arcing. Witness
23 statements place the fire as being small in size near the areas I identified as the
24 Specific Origin Areas and the power going out between 4:00 and 4:15 AM, which
25 correlates to the estimate provided by SDG&E. During the course of the
26 investigation I eliminated all other causes for the fire, determining the Rice Fire to
27 be a power line caused fire.

28 Glass refraction – During my investigation I did not observe any pieces of glass or
29 reflective objects in either Specific Origin Area. I observed no pieces of debris,
30 or reflective materials during the perimeter search or during my investigation of

1 the Specific Origin Areas which could have contributed to the cause of the fire.
2 Additionally, based on the time the fire occurred and on the above facts I
3 eliminated a glass refraction caused fire.

4 Incendiary – Based upon witness statements, my observations of the downed power
5 lines located in both Specific Origin Areas I eliminated an arson caused fire. I
6 did not locate any incendiary devices in either Specific Origin Area. Both
7 Specific Origin Areas were located a distance from the roadway, in areas where
8 no trails or easy access could be made. There were no indications this was an
9 arson caused fire, and based upon the above facts I eliminated an arson caused
10 fire.

11 12 *Interviews*

13 I first interviewed W-1 Frank DeSILVA on October 23, 2007. He said he was up at
14 approximately 4:10 AM on October 21, 2007 and saw sparks coming from the area
15 later identified as Specific Origin Area #2, but he didn't know what they were coming
16 from. His friend "Bob" came up to his house to tell him about the fire. When he first
17 saw the fire he estimated it was twenty-feet in size and around the pole with the
18 transformer on the west side of Rice Canyon Road.

19
20 On October 23, 2007 I also met with W-2 Ed JONES at his residence. JONES said
21 he woke up on October 22, 2007 at approximately 3:00 AM. He was watching TV
22 and he said the power went out at approximately 4:05 AM. He then went outside of
23 his residence and saw fire below the upper pole and to the right of it by the lower
24 pole. These areas he described lined up with the Specific Origin Areas #1 and #2 I
25 previously identified. I photographed the view from JONES residence, where he
26 described seeing the fires. He described the upper fire as being more intense than
27 than the lower fire.

28 29 *October 24, 2007*

30 On October 24, 2007 I returned to the Rice Canyon Fire where I met O-2 Joseph

1 TORRES and SDG&E representative. SDG&E was re-stringing the lines in the Rice
2 Canyon area. I asked TORRES to assist me in identifying damage to the lines in
3 both Specific Origin Areas. TORRES described the spackling I observed on the
4 lines adjacent to Specific Origin Area #2 as indicative of the line coming in contact
5 with vegetation in the area. We also looked at the beading and breaks in the line
6 near Specific Origin Area #1. He described the break in the line as looking like it
7 occurred in an area where the spackling occurred. TORRES also said he believed
8 the power had gone out in the area approximately 4:00 AM on October 22, 2007.

9
10 I also interviewed W-3 Tom DAVIS via telephone. DAVIS was the first 911 caller for
11 the Rice Fire. He said he left his house at approximately 4:00 AM on October 22,
12 2007. When he left his house the power was on. It was between 4:00 AM and 4:15
13 AM same date when he saw the fire. He described the fire as being twenty to thirty
14 feet off of the road and seven to eight feet in diameter by an oak tree. He described
15 the fire as on the west side of Rice Canyon Road by a big tree. He described fifteen
16 foot high flames on the north side of the tree. He described the flames as looking
17 really hot. The area DAVIS described matches with the area where I located
18 Specific Origin Area #2.

19
20 I also spoke with O-4 Larry HALL from SDG&E via telephone. We were working
21 towards obtaining records relating to both the Witch Fire and the Rice Fire. He
22 asked if I had any information on the cause of the Rice Fire, and I said it was a
23 power line caused fire. He replied "I know that."

24
25 *November 2, 2007*

26 On November 2, 2007 I met with members from SDG&E regarding the Rice Fire and
27 the Witch Fire. HALL stated they are attempting to retrieve the tree information for
28 the effected trees adjacent to the Specific Origin Area #2. I did learn the area
29 surrounding the line which caused the Rice Fire had been inspected in July 2007 for
30 trees which needed to be trimmed. The sycamore tree identified adjacent to

1 Specific Origin Area #2 was determined to be in compliance with no need for any
2 priority work. Davey Tree also inspected the tree and determined the tree to be
3 healthy and in compliance. On September 1, 2007 Davey Tree received a full
4 package of scheduled work to be completed in the area, and the work was
5 supposed to be completed prior to November 1, 2007.

6 7 **Opinions & Conclusions**

8 Based on my training, experience, witness statements and observations made at the
9 scene I determined the Rice Fire to be a power line caused fire. I located downed
10 power lines in each Specific Origin Area and each Specific Origin Area was
11 correlated by witness statements and a second investigator. I observed arcing and
12 spackling on the lines near each Specific Origin Area, which is indicative of the lines
13 being energized. Also, SDG&E records indicate the lines were energized when the
14 fire occurred. During the course of my investigation I eliminated all other causes for
15 the fire.